



FIT CITY MONTHLY CHALLENGE-FEBRUARY
For Valentine's Day, Help Your Heart—
Raise Your HDL Cholesterol and Lower Your Triglycerides

Many of us have read or seen on television that high levels of LDL cholesterol increases the risk of heart disease by getting into the walls of arteries that feed the heart and brain, blocking these arteries and encouraging clots to form, thus causing a heart attack or stroke. However, there is a “good” form of cholesterol—HDL cholesterol—and the more of *this* type of cholesterol you have, the less your chances are of having a heart attack. High HDL cholesterol combined with low triglycerides is associated with a low risk of having a heart attack.

About one third to one fourth of blood cholesterol is HDL cholesterol. It is considered “good” because it actually carries cholesterol out of the arteries. The higher your HDL, the more cholesterol is being removed from your arteries. HDL cholesterol does not come from the food you eat, but you can encourage your body to make more of it through exercise and weight loss. In addition to raising your HDL cholesterol levels, lowering your triglycerides will help reduce the risk of a heart attack.

When we eat more than our body needs, the extra calories are stored as fat. Over ninety percent of the stored fat is in the form of triglycerides. Most people who are significantly overweight, obese and/or have diabetes are also likely to have high triglycerides. As triglycerides go up in the blood, HDL cholesterol tends to go down. A combination of high triglycerides and low HDL cholesterol is a strong indicator that you are at a high risk for a heart attack.

One method that can raise HDL cholesterol while lowering triglycerides is to begin a program of regular exercise and to eat a healthy diet. Physical activity lowers triglycerides because muscles use triglycerides for fuel. Exercise and weight loss encourage the body to increase the amount of HDL cholesterol levels in your blood. Exercise and a low fat diet will help you reduce body fat, and lower the triglycerides in your blood and as triglycerides go down in the blood, HDL cholesterol tends to go up.

Have your blood lipids checked next time you visit your doctor. If you don't have a doctor, you can get these tests done free of charge by donating blood on Mondays at the South Texas Blood and Tissue Center. For more about the South Texas Blood and Tissue Center, call 731-5555.